

REVIEWS

1. BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT – A FIELD GUIDE. By Ranjit Manakadan, J.C. Daniel and Nikhil Bhopale. Illustrations by John Henry Dick. Published by Bombay Natural History Society/Oxford University Press. 2011. 409 pp. Size: 14 cm x 21.8 cm. Price: Rs. 550/-. Hardback.

This new avatar of A PICTORIAL GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT first published in 1983 by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) as part of their centenary celebrations looks compact and handy, and has a real nice feel about it. Being the first ever attempt to illustrate (nearly) all the bird species found in the Subcontinent in one volume, it is a real shame that the Society did not cash in on the golden opportunity to publish the book in the present format earlier, which would have benefited birdwatchers all over the country. But it is always better late than never.

The text part of the book includes brief accounts, family-wise, as in the PICTORIAL GUIDE (but now following the sequence as in the BIRDS OF SOUTH ASIA – THE RIPLEY GUIDE by Rasmussen and Anderton with a cross reference to the plates. This is followed by the plates – 112 in all, covering 1,251 species. The text, in addition, describes about 100 species (mostly based on recent splits).

The text facing the plates contains the reference number in THE HANDBOOK OF BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN by Sálím Ali and S. Dillon Ripley, the common English name (with alternate names in parentheses) and the scientific name. The common names are based on the recommendations of Manakadan and Pittie (2001) or THE RIPLEY GUIDE, while the alternative names are those that are used in other recent field guides. The residential status (using abbreviations) and the size of the bird (both in cm, as well as based on comparison with some common and familiar bird as a standard) are given. This is followed by a brief reference to the species' distribution in the Subcontinent, often including individual records in case of uncommon birds. The ID section is crisp and contains essential tips to identify the bird and variations in the plumage. Calls are described for certain groups of birds, but not all the species. Wherever applicable, a brief note mentions the changes in taxonomy and describes recent splits, mainly based on THE RIPLEY GUIDE. There is also a cross reference to the species account in THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (13th Edition), and a mention in case a particular species' occurrence in the region is treated as hypothetical by THE RIPLEY GUIDE.

Other than this, the book also contains a brief Preface that traces the evolution of illustrated bird guides in the Indian subcontinent, a brief biographical sketch of Dr. Sálím Ali and Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, the two doyens of Indian Ornithology; a brief introduction to the book and its various features, explanations and abbreviations, a glossary of

technical terms used in the book, diagrams depicting bird topography and exhaustive indices (plate-wise, common names and scientific names). The book has also used 53 vintage paintings of birds from older publications and has a colour map of the Subcontinent. The paintings are used as fillers so that the plates always appear on the left side with the text facing it.

I wish to make the following observations and comments on this publication:

The title of the book could have been different as we now have two versions of the book – the one by Grimmett and Inskipp also bears the same title (but different sub-titles), and this could cause some amount of confusion.

Compared with the PICTORIAL GUIDE (1st Edition), I find the illustrations less cluttered and more sober in colours. Quite a few illustrations have been 'touched-up' to enhance accuracy. However, I still felt plates 93 and 94 that deal with warblers (19 and 22 species respectively), for instance, could have had bigger illustrations as the differences between the species are more subtle and need to be emphasised to enable easier identification in the field, even if this means more plates, more bulk and higher cost of production.

The uniform usage of white background for the plates is easier on the eye, though in some instances where the species has, for instance, white coloration on its outer tail feathers, these are not always easily noticeable (example: Pl. 101: spp. nos. 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17).

There is no indication of the scale of the birds in the plates and so the result can be somewhat misleading, especially for beginners: e.g., Plate 51: Rollers and Trogons; Plate 60: Lined and Great Barbets; and Plate 34: Great Indian Bustard and Sarus Crane.

There is still some scope for improving the details in the illustration, e.g., Plate 70: White-browed Bulbul shows much darker underparts than in real life or as mentioned in the text. Also, in the case of migrant waders and warblers, variations in the summer and winter plumages are not shown in the plates. The text is also silent about some of these variations.

In the arrangement of plates, at least I could come across two instances where individual species got isolated from their family or genera. Drongo Cuckoo finds its place on Plate 110 along with drongos rather than with the cuckoos (Plates 51-52) and there is not even a mention of the species in the cuckoo section! The other instance is that of the Ashy-

headed Laughing Thrush of Sri Lanka (Plate 87), which is isolated from the other laughing thrushes and is placed along with babblers.

I also have a comment on the illustration of the Indian Pygmy Woodpecker (a filler diagram appearing on page 201) where the pair is shown perched cross-wise (like passerines) on twigs, quite close to the ground, mobbing a snake. These birds, in my experience, are usually found foraging on tall trees and closer to the canopy and mid-canopy strata. This diagram therefore is somewhat misleading.

Though the text is brief, it appears to be quite adequate in most cases. Yet, I find that some most recent information had been omitted as in the case of the Lesser Grey-headed Fish-eagle (p. 63) and the Grey-headed Lapwing (p. 117) where there have been several recent sightings outside the range that is mentioned in the book.

While the section on ID has been dealt in fair amount of detail and without too much of cluttering of data, making it user-friendly, it may look too simplistic in the case of difficult groups, such as warblers, pipits, larks, etc. To identify birds in these groups, one needs details such as the jizz, habits, etc., which are lacking in this work. Again in the bird groups, such as raptors, details on the ID are kept to the bare minimum with information on intermediate plumages and colour phases omitted. This is bound to cause problems for inexperienced birdwatchers.

Calls are described only for select groups of birds like

2. UNGULATE TAXONOMY by Colin Groves and Peter Grubb. Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA, 2011. 317 pp. Size: 26 cm x 18 cm. Price not mentioned. Hardback.

Ungulates or hoofed animals, belonging to Orders Artiodactyla and Perissodactyla, are some of the most visible animals of any landscape. They are generally large, mobile, most of them live in big herds, and are good to eat, hence extensively hunted. Some of them have been domesticated for thousands of years from their wild ancestors. For example, goat *Capra hircus* Linnaeus 1758 from wild *Capra aegagrus* Erxleben 1777, water buffalo *Bubalus bubalis* (Linnaeus 1758) from *Bubalus arnee* (Keer 1792), and pig *Sus domesticus* Erxleben 1777 from *Sus scrofa* Linnaeus 1758. These domestic ungulates have influenced civilizations and played a major role in the dispersal of human beings. Can one imagine life without the dromedary camel *Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus 1758, in the Arabian Desert? Or travel in the remote corners of the Andes without the llama *Lama glama* (Linnaeus 1758) that originated from the wild *Lama guanicoe* (Müller 1776).

Being large and familiar does not mean that the taxonomy of ungulates is well-understood. A few taxa are

the owls, nightjars, some warblers, barbets, some cuckoos, doves, pheasants, partridges and quails, pipits and bush-larks. In some of the species where calls are perhaps the first clue to the presence of these birds in their respective habitats (e.g., Spotted or Puff-throated Babbler, the whistling thrushes, Indian Pitta, Coucal), lack of this vital information is bound to cause some amount of disappointment. Indeed, to make identification more reliable, I often depend not only on the physical features of the birds, but also its micro-habitat, calls, characteristic habits, etc. I do hope the future edition would look into these aspects as well so that the text is well-balanced and more comprehensive.

An indication of the conservation status of the species (in terms of the various conservation categories) would have been useful and alerted the users of this book to collect more details about the species for conservation purposes. Lists of organizations involved in bird conservation, useful resources such as good birding sites, IBAs, websites, books, etc., would have been welcome features to novices to birdwatching and birders visiting the Subcontinent.

Overall, I find this publication a very useful addition to the bird literature of the Subcontinent and I hope more birdwatchers would use it in the field because of its compact size. Besides, the price-tag is very attractive and I feel this book is real value for money.

■ V. SANTHARAM

extremely complex and a challenge to taxonomists to unravel their phylogeny. The first major work on ungulate taxonomy was published by Pallas in 1766, 1767-77, and 1811, through his collection trip to the Russian Empire and also based on descriptions by others. The next major contributor was Alfonse Desmarest in 1822, who described new species from the collections of French explorers, deposited in the Paris Museum, and also confiscated from other museums during the brief colonisation of neighbouring countries by Napoleon Bonaparte. By the end of the 19th century, the British Museum (Natural History) had a huge collection of specimens from Asia, Africa and the Americas. Ungulate taxonomy was described by Richard Lydekker in 1913, 1914, and 1915 as a Catalogue Series from the specimens present in the British Museum (Natural History). Till this book came out in 2011, for almost 100 years there was no serious revision of ungulate taxonomy, although Colin P. Groves had published numerous research papers on this subject, starting from 1967.

The first author, whom I know through correspondence, has more than 45 years experience in ungulate distribution, morphology, behaviour and taxonomy. He has published nearly 80 papers on taxonomy as first author, besides an equal number as second or third co-author. The second author was also a leading ungulate taxonomist, until his death in December 2006. This book is the seminal work of these two great ungulate taxonomists.

Species-by-species accounts incorporate new genetic and morphological information as well as the authors' own observations and measurements from various museums. I am interested in *Gazella* as I have done some studies on Chinkara *Gazella bennettii*. The taxonomy of this genus is extremely complex and controversial. There are three clades in this genus: the *G. bennettii* group, the *G. subgutturosa* group, and a *G. dorcas/G. spekei/G. gazella* group. Within the Chinkara *G. bennettii* group, this book describes five subspecies or types. Two taxa are found in Iran and Pakistan: Western Jbeber *Gazella shikarii* Groves 1993, and Eastern Jbeber *G. fuscifrons* Blanford 1873, while three taxa are found in India and Pakistan. They are Gujarat Chinkara *G. christyi* Blyth, 1842, found in Gujarat, Thar Desert, and probably the rest of Rajasthan; Deccan Chinkara *G. bennettii* (Sykes 1831), found in the Deccan Plateau and the Ganges Valley; and Salt Range Gazelle *G. salinarum* Groves 2003, found from Salt Range eastwards to Delhi.

There are some interesting taxonomic discoveries described in this book. For example, the Arabian Tahr, till recently known as *Hemitragus jayakari* Thomas 1894 and described from Oman, was considered related to Himalayan Tahr *Hemitragus jemlahicus* (Hamilton-Smith 1827). It is now placed in genus *Ammotragus* and related to *Ammotragus lervia* Pallas 1777, a mysterious species restricted to the mountain ranges in the Sahara and the Meghreb. The endemic Nilgiri Tahr, first described as *Kemas hylacrius* in 1837 by Ogilby, but subsequently placed in genus *Hemitragus* (Prater 1980), now has its own genus *Nilgiritragus* Ropiquet & Hussanin 2005, and surprisingly, it is more closely related to *Ovis*, than to the other species of tahr.

The book also lists some of the critically endangered ungulate species of the world, which is a sad reflection on the activities of human beings as most of these ungulates are dying due to hunting, habitat destruction, and in some cases purely due to conservation neglect. For example, Javan Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus* is the second rarest of all large mammals in the world with less than 60 surviving. *Gazella acaciae* may have only 20 individuals left in total, and *G. arabica* has not been seen since its original description, 180 years ago, while *G. bilkis* may be extinct, or nearly so, because of overhunting. Schomburgk's Deer *Rucervus schomburgki* described by Blyth

in 1863, of which BNHS has a mounted head, is probably extinct. It was known only from the swamps of Central Thailand. Its relative, Swamp Deer *Rucervus duvaucelii*, occurring in three subspecies, is doing fine, thanks to conservation efforts made by India and Nepal.

Sadly, the status of wild relatives of domestic animals, which are our most valuable genetic resource, is nothing to be proud of. For example, *Bos sauveli* or Kouprey of Thailand, described in 1937, is probably extinct due to overhunting. It was known to hybridise with Banteng *Bos javanicus*, which itself is threatened with extinction. Bali cattle and the feral Australian Banteng population are derived from the wild Banteng. A valuable genetic resource, which we could have used to improve the Bali cattle, has been lost with the extinction of Kouprey. Similarly, another important potential genetic resource, *Bubalus mindorensis* Heude 1888 or Tamaraw, also known as Philippine Dwarf Buffalo, is reduced to less than 300 individuals. Closer home, we have the Asian Wild Buffalo *Bubalus arnee*, with four subspecies. *Bubalus arnee arnee* (Keer 1792) was found from the north-east Nepal Terai, and formerly from the Sundarbans south-west to Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. It now survives in small numbers in Nepal, and an ecologically dead population in central India (with only one known adult female). Despite the fact that it is a direct ancestor of our domestic buffalo and an extremely valuable genetic resource, practically no attention is given by the Indian Government to protect the wild population in central India. Fortunately, recent genetic studies by Kumar *et al.* (2007) on the Wild Buffalo of Kosi-Tapu in Nepal show very little gene flow from domestic to wild animals, and rather more gene flow the other way. This gives us hope that if subspecies *arnee* disappears from central India, we might be able to get the pure wild strain from Nepal to reintroduce it in India. The second subspecies *Bubalus arnee fulvus* (Blanford 1891) is in slightly better condition in Assam and the lower reaches of Bhutan (Choudhury 2011), but may be extinct in Bangladesh where it was known from Chittagong Hills. The third subspecies *B. arnee theerapati* Groves 1996, still occurs in Thailand and Cambodia. The fourth subspecies, which some consider feral, termed *B. b. mrigona* Deraniyagala 1952, is located in Yala National Park, Sri Lanka, and is now threatened by interbreeding with domestic buffalo.

This is a serious and technical book, not for the general reader who has grown up seeing glossy coffee-table books of the African savanna ungulates, but a must for any library and museum. I agree with the blurb on the last page of the book "A well-reasoned synthesis, UNGULATE TAXONOMY will be a defining volume for years to come."

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3. CONSERVATION REFUGEES: THE HUNDRED-YEAR CONFLICT BETWEEN GLOBAL CONSERVATION AND NATIVE PEOPLES by Mark Dowie. Published by Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Massachusetts, USA, 2009. 339 pp. Size: 23.5 cm x 15.5 cm. Price not mentioned. Hardback.

This is a remarkable, thought-provoking and controversial book from an investigative journalist, well-known for his strong views on the rights of local communities. I must say that this book should be read by all leading conservationists, human rights activists, conservation NGOs, decision makers and anyone who is interested in the long-term security of wildlife and wild places. It is now recognized all over the world that without involving local communities and using their traditional knowledge and wisdom, we cannot save our protected areas, and particularly large wide-ranging landscape species. As modern human beings are the major problem for PAs and species conservation, we cannot have a solution without involving them.

Like many other modern concepts (and problems), the idea of establishing large protected areas was started in the USA by the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. Since then, more than one hundred thousand PAs have been established in the world. While half of them were established in remote, uninhabited, or thinly inhabited areas, the rest had indigenous people living or regularly using them for hundreds of years. In the northern countries, local communities or inhabitants were incorporated into the PAs, but in less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, local communities were displaced in the interest of conservation. Now they are fighting back, leading to huge conflicts. Sadly, the worst sufferers in these people-PA conflicts are the species or ecosystems for which these PAs were established in the first place. This is particularly acute where local people do not benefit from PAs. With no political support to wildlife conservation, particularly in democracies, and increasing demands of people and industries, the future of the present concept of PAs looks bleak.

The book is divided in 19 major chapters, covering examples of PA-tribal conflicts from all over the world. The language is simple, free of jargon, except for the large number of abbreviations dotted all over the book. The author is particularly harsh on large international conservation

organizations or BINGOs (Big International NGOs) such as WWF, IUCN, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society and TNC. The text in many places shows his prejudice rather than an objective assessment. We have to accept that BINGOs and national and regional conservation organizations have played a major role in arresting the decline of many threatened species. Admittedly, we could have achieved many more conservation successes by greater involvement and benefit to indigenous communities, but priorities are now changing. People's involvement in conservation is now in the mandate of all major dynamic NGOs such as BirdLife International, whose motive is "For Birds, For People".

The journalistic streak of the author is seen throughout the book. In many places, the language and tone is of an activist pamphleteer, not an unbiased serious writer. Although Mark Dowie extensively quotes writer-thinkers like Ramachandran Guha and Ashish Kothari, particularly on Indian issues, many quotes have been taken out of context to fit his views. He is also wrong in many places. I quote only Indian cases. For instance, it is wrong to say that "about eight thousand tribal people and low-caste farmers living in the Kuno area ... were summarily uprooted from the rich farmlands ... for a pride of six imported Asiatic lions." I have been to Kuno-Palpur many times in the 1980s. First of all, the people "uprooted" were not all tribal and low caste, secondly they were not cultivating "rich farmland". Most of them were living in extreme poverty in remote villages, with very little cultivable land, with no facilities like potable water, electricity, proper schools and hospitals. The roads were so bad that once I had to return halfway, without even reaching Palpur. It is also wrong to sensationalise that "for a pride of six imported Asiatic lions", 8,000 poor "tribal people" were uprooted. Reintroduction of the Asiatic Lion into Kuno-Palpur was a well-thought out scheme, and the "tribal people" were given good compensation, cultivable land and basic facilities that they did not have in their remote forest villages. Kuno-Palpur is one good example of properly planned

relocation and rehabilitation where now the villagers have good cultivated land, accessible roads, schools, hospitals and modern connectivity. Unfortunately, the "six imported Asiatic lions" have not reached Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary due to petty politics in Gujarat, but that is a different story.

The book frequently glorifies the "sustainable lifestyle of tribal and indigenous communities". I wish this were true, even partially. Increase in human population, decrease of forest cover and demands of market forces have upturned these so-called sustainable lifestyles. What was sustainable a hundred years ago, with a small tribal community with thousands of square kilometres of forest/grassland around them to exploit, is no more sustainable. If all tribals really live sustainably, why do we have barren hillsides for miles and miles in the tribal districts of western Madhya Pradesh or the Khandesh area of Maharashtra? Why is it that practically no large ungulate survives in the tribal districts of northern Gujarat? Isn't sustainable hunting beneficial for tribals so they can hunt throughout their life and for

generations without exterminating wildlife? Hunting is so intense and unsustainable that even sighting a squirrel is difficult in some of these tribal inhabited areas in Gujarat. If tribal wisdom teaches us to live sustainably, then why have the tribals of Nicobar started using snares to catch egg-laying Nicobar Megapode, and shoot birds by airguns. Why can't they harvest a few eggs from the Megapode nest mounds and spare the adult birds so they can lay more eggs. Even in our backyard poultry, we do not kill egg-laying birds.

Admittedly, the book gives a one-sided view and glorifies the role of tribal communities and their so-called sustainable lifestyle. Nonetheless, it is an interesting book and should be read by all those who are interested in wildlife conservation. We may not agree with every viewpoint of Mark Dowie, but we cannot afford to ignore him either. That is why I say, it is a remarkable book because it forces us to re-think our conservation paradigm.

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4. THE STORY OF ASIA'S ELEPHANTS by Raman Sukumar. Published by The Marg Foundation, 2011. 339 pp. Size: 18.7 cm x 22.5 cm. Price: Rs. 3,500/-. Hardback.

The Asian Elephant is again at the crossroads of its survival struggle against man. Of the three species of the elephant family that inhabited the earth, only two remain: the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) and African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). The tale of the extinction of the mammoth, brought about by climate change and aided by persecution by man, is an ominous sign on what could befall the two extant species if elephant habitats continue to be destroyed and the animals persecuted. Of the two extant species, the situation of the Asian Elephant is more at risk as its populations are now confined to the few remaining forests, and even these last tracts are facing huge pressures due to the increasing human population.

Once widely spread from the Euphrates through the Indian subcontinent, Indo-China, southern China and SE Asia, the Asian Elephant now occurs in pockets in some of its former ranges numbering around 40 to 50 thousand animals, with more than 50% of the population in India. Elephant has always fascinated humankind and no other wild animal has had such a close love-hate relationship with man. Hinduism venerated it to the status of a god (Lord Ganesha) – one reason why there are fairly still so many elephants left in India. Used for war, for carrying deities and rajas, in forestry operations, to entertain in circuses, for begging and also hunted for ivory, their association with humans has a long history.

Dr. Raman Sukumar is India's most well-known elephant biologist and an authority on the Asian Elephant

worldwide. A Professor at the Centre for Ecological Studies, Indian Institute of Science, he has his own set-up, the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, which has undertaken a number of significant projects on elephants and other wildlife. Dr. Sukumar has three 'bestsellers' on elephants to his credit. The first, *THE ASIAN ELEPHANT: ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT* (1989), is a scientific treatise of the species based largely on his doctoral work in southern India (the Biligirirangans) investigating its ecology and interaction with man. This was followed by *ELEPHANT DAYS AND NIGHTS* (1994), a popular account of his initiation into elephant studies and his doctoral work. This publication, besides throwing light on his work and findings on the Asian Elephant makes delightful reading, revealing Dr. Sukumar's talent as a gifted writer. The third, *THE LIVING ELEPHANTS: EVOLUTIONARY ECOLOGY, BEHAVIOUR AND CONSERVATION*, covered both the Asian and African elephants, dealing with their evolution, behaviour, ecology, their interactions with humans, and their conservation and management. This was regarded as his *magnum opus* till date.

The new publication, a highly illustrated book, primarily provides a historical account of the Asian Elephant, tracing its association with man, and impacts/influences on the culture, religion, wars and lifestyles of people in India and in the rest of its distributional range. This is no doubt another significant publication on the Asian Elephant by Dr. Sukumar. Even from a casual perusal of the publication, one quickly realizes it is a high quality publication – from

the design and layout of the book, quality of the illustrations, coverage, authoritative text and its readability. Reading the book, one not only gets to know more on the cultural history of the Asian Elephant from ancient to contemporary times, but gets one's knowledge of history (and archaeology) brushed up, as there is a lot of discussion on wars and kingdoms in which elephants figured.

All said, I would have preferred a smaller and more compact book. Size and bulk are becoming a liability in today's world as mankind moves into flats and smaller dwellings, with books of various disciplines flooding the market, and in our attempts towards a more eco-friendly world. This could have been achieved with more judicious use of space by reducing the size of the images where large-sized illustrations seem unnecessary (e.g., see pages 24 and 67) and with crisp page formatting (e.g., see pages 70-71). The electronic media, which is slowly taking over hard copy

options, can be expected to be the norm in the generations to come. But I guess, till then, authors will cherish a publication in a physical form, for its visual grandeur and the pleasure in just possessing it and while gifting it to someone.

The last chapter is on the ecology and conservation of the Asian Elephant, which seems out of sync with the other chapters, as also with the introductory write-ups on evolution of the elephant family. These write-ups may be informative for a person who is new to elephants, but ideally, I feel that the publication should have restricted its coverage to the relationship of man with elephants, and more so since the author has other books that cover elephant ecology, behaviour and conservation. This is not to say in any way that it is not a great book in its present form – all elephant researchers must necessarily possess a copy.

■ RANJIT MANAKADAN

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